Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Original) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution comprising a dissolved metal salt which, in use, hydrolyses to form a gel,

wherein the solution contains suspended inorganic particles.

2. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to ~~any one of the previous claims~~ claim 1, wherein the dissolved metal salt is an aluminium salt.

3. (Original) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 2, wherein the aluminium salt is an aluminium halide or a hydrated aluminium halide.

4. (Original) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 1, wherein the inorganic particles are elongate.

5. (Original) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 4, wherein the elongate inorganic particles are boehmite needles.

6. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 4 ~~or 5~~, wherein the elongate inorganic particles have a mean aspect ratio of at least 8.

7. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to ~~any one of claims 4 to 6~~ claim 4, wherein the elongate inorganic particles have a mean aspect ratio of at least 16.

8. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to ~~any one of claims 4 to 7~~ claim 4, wherein the metal salt is a polyvalent metal salt.

9. (Original) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 8, wherein the metal salt is an aluminium salt.

10. (Original) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 9, wherein the aluminium salt is an aluminium halide or a hydrated aluminium halide.

11. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to ~~any one of claims 4 to 7~~ claim 4, wherein the metal salt is a sodium silicate.

12. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to ~~any one of the previous claims~~ claim 1, wherein the solution further comprises a hydrolisation activator.

13. An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 12, wherein the hydrolisation activator is a pH-increasing reactant.

14. (Currently Amended) An aqueous delayed-gelation solution according to claim 12 ~~or 13~~, wherein the hydrolisation activator is urea or urea derivative.

15. (Currently Amended) Use of the delayed-gelation solution according to ~~any one of the previous claims~~ claim 1 for treating a hydrocarbon well.

16. (Currently Amended) A method of selectively placing a delayed-gelation solution in a hydrocarbon well, the method comprising the steps of:

providing the aqueous delayed-gelation solution of ~~any one of claims 1 to 14~~ claim 1, and

injecting the solution into the hydrocarbon well, whereby the suspended inorganic particles reduce or block the flow of the delayed-gelation solution to relatively low permeability formation zones thereby selectively placing the solution in a relatively high permeability formation zone.

17. (Currently Amended) A method of reducing the permeability of a formation zone of a hydrocarbon well, the method comprising the steps of:

providing the aqueous delayed-gelation solution of ~~any one of claims 1 to 14~~ claim 1,

placing the solution in the formation zone, and

allowing the dissolved metal salt to hydrolyse, thereby forming a gel which contains suspended inorganic particles and which reduces the permeability of the zone.